

In the claims:

Please cancel claims 7 and 16, and amend claims 1, 3, 6, 10, 13-14 and 19-20. The status of the claims is:

1. (Currently Amended) Using one or more computers, Aa method for pricing a session of ~~a usage-based~~ an on-line service comprising the steps of:

dividing the session a potential usage period into a plurality of tiers, each tier comprising a period of time;

assigning a usage rate to each of said tiers, said usage rate having units of price per unit time;

assigning an incremental charge to each of said tiers, said incremental charge having units of price that are independent of time;

determining a tier usage amount for each of said tiers for the session by determining how much time was spent in each of said tiers;

calculating a usage cost for each of said tiers by multiplying said tier usage amount by said usage rate for each respective of said tiers;

calculating a total usage cost by summing each of said tier usage costs;

calculating a total incremental cost by summing said incremental charges for each tier entered during the session; and,

determining the price of pricing the session by summing said total usage cost and said total incremental cost.

2. (Original) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein each of said plurality of tiers is characterized by a beginning threshold usage value.

3. (Currently Amended) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein a first of said plurality of tiers has a threshold usage value of zero ~~units~~.

4. (Original) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein a last of said plurality of tiers extends to infinite usage.

5. (Original) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein said plurality of tiers is consecutive with one another.

6. (Currently Amended) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein said plurality of tiers each ~~being~~is equal in usage duration.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Original) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein at least one of said tier usage rates is negative.

9. (Original) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein at least one of said tier incremental charges is negative.

10. (Currently Amended) A method as defined by claim 1 wherein said plurality of tiers are characterized by a beginning threshold usage value and a tier duration usage value; wherein said plurality of tiers are consecutive with one another, and wherein said step of determining a tier usage amount for each of said tiers comprises the steps of:

determining a total session usage amount for the session;

determining which of said tiers have been entered during the session;

determining which of said tiers have been exceeded during the session; and,

determining a tier usage amount for each of said tiers entered during the session by setting said tier usage value equal to said tier duration value for each of said exceeded tiers, and subtracting said tier beginning threshold value from said total session usage amount for a tier that has been entered but not exceeded.

11. (Original) A method as defined by claim 10 wherein said step of determining whether a tier has been entered comprises:

determining that a respective of the plurality of tiers has been entered if said total session usage is greater than or equal to said beginning threshold usage value for said respective tier.

12. (Original) A method as defined by claim 10 wherein said step of determining whether a tier has been exceeded comprises:

determining that a respective tier has been exceeded if a subsequent tier has been entered during the session.

13. (Currently Amended) Using one or more computers, A method for pricing a session of ~~a usage-based~~ an on-line service comprising the steps of:

dividing a potential usage period into a plurality of tiers, each of said tiers characterized by a beginning threshold usage value and a tier duration, each of said tiers having an endpoint at a usage amount equal to a sum of said threshold beginning usage value and said tier duration, said tiers being consecutive whereby said endpoint of a preceding tier is coincident with said beginning threshold usage value for a succeeding second tier, a first of said plurality of tiers having a beginning threshold value of zero units;

assigning a usage rate to each of said tiers having units of price per unit time, at least one of said usage rates being negative;

assigning an incremental charge to each of said tiers having units of price independent of time;

determining a total usage amount for the session;

determining that a respective tiers of the plurality of tiers has been entered if said total session usage is at least equal to said beginning threshold time for said respective tier;

determining that a respective tier has been exceeded if a subsequent tier has been entered during the session;

determining a tier usage amount for each of said tiers entered during the session by setting said tier usage value equal to said tier duration value for each of said exceeded tiers, and subtracting said tier beginning threshold value from said total session usage for a tier that has been entered but not exceeded;

calculating a usage cost for each of said tiers by multiplying said tier usage amount by said usage rate for each respective of said tiers;

calculating a total usage cost by summing each of said tier usage costs;

calculating a total incremental cost by summing said incremental charges for each tier entered during the session; and,

pricing the session by summing said total usage cost and said total incremental cost.

14. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for causing a computer to calculate a price for a session of a ~~usage-based~~ an on-line service, the program product comprising a set of computer executable instructions embedded in a computer readable medium, the executable steps when executed causing the computer to:

divide a potential usage period into a plurality of tiers, each tier starting with a threshold usage value;

assign a per time unit usage rate to each of said tiers;

assign an incremental charge to each of said tiers having units of price independent of time;

determine a usage value for each of said tiers for the session;

calculate a usage cost for each of said tiers by multiplying said usage value by said per unit usage rate for each respective of said tiers;

calculate a total usage cost by summing each of said usage costs for each of said tiers;

calculate a total incremental charge by summing each of said incremental charges for each tier entered during the session; and,

calculate the price for the session by summing said total usage cost and said total incremental charge.

15. (Original) A computer program product as defined by claim 14 wherein a first tier of said plurality of tiers has a threshold usage value of zero units, and a last of said plurality of tiers extends to infinite usage.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Original) A computer program product as defined by claim 14 wherein at least one of said usage rates is negative.

18. (Original) A computer program product as defined by claim 14 wherein at least one of said incremental costs is negative.

19. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for causing a computer to calculate a price for a session of an on-line service, the program product comprising a set of computer executable instructions embedded in a computer readable medium, the executable steps when executed causing the computer to:

divide a potential usage period into a plurality of tiers, each of said tiers characterized by a beginning threshold usage value, a duration usage, and a duration endpoint, said tiers being consecutive whereby a first tier having an endpoint coincident with the beginning of a second tier, a first of said plurality of tiers having a beginning threshold value of zero;

assign a usage rate to each of said tiers having units of price per unit time, at least one of said usage rates being negative;

assign an incremental charge to each of said tiers having units of price and being independent of time;

determine a total usage value for the session by determining the amount of time spent by the user during the on-line session;

determine a tier usage value for each of said tiers entered during the session comprising the amount of usage value occurring between said beginning threshold value and said final duration value for said tier;

calculate a usage cost for each of said tiers by multiplying said tier usage value by said usage rate for each respective of said tiers;

calculate a total usage cost by summing each of said tier usage costs;

determine a respective of said tiers to have been entered during the session if said usage value is greater than said beginning threshold value for said respective tier;

calculate a total incremental cost by summing said incremental charges for each tier entered during the session; and,

calculate a price for the session by summing said total usage cost and said total incremental cost.

20. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for causing a computer to calculate a price for a session of an on-line service, the program product comprising a set of computer executable instructions embedded in a computer readable medium, the executable steps when executed causing the computer to:

determine the total on-line usage amount during the session;

create a plurality of consecutive tiers within a potential on-line usage amount, each of said tiers characterized by a beginning threshold usage amount and a tier duration usage;

compare the total on-line usage amount to said plurality of tier threshold times;

determine that a respective tier of the plurality of tiers has been entered during the session if said total on-line usage amount is greater than or equal to said beginning threshold usage amount for said respective tier;

determine that a respective tier has been exceeded during the session if a subsequent tier has been entered;

determine a tier usage amount for each of said plurality of tiers by setting said tier usage value equal to said tier duration usage for each of said exceeded tiers, and subtracting said tier beginning threshold usage amount from said total usage amount for a tier that has been entered but not exceeded;

assign a usage rate to each of said tiers having units of price per unit time;

assign an incremental charge to each of said tiers having units of price only and being independent of time;

determine a tier usage cost by multiplying said tier usage rate by said tier usage amount for each of said tiers;

calculate a total usage cost by summing each of said tier usage costs;

calculate a total incremental cost by summing said incremental charges for each of said entered tiers; and,

calculate a price for the session by summing said total usage cost and said total incremental cost.